Chairman Mark Holden called the Special Meeting of the Board of Education to order at 6:09 p.m.

Roll Call:
Mark Holden, Chairman
Thomas Minotti, Vice Chairman
Arlene Liscinsky, Secretary
David Gioiello
Faith Hack

Kate Kutash
Win Oppel (Via Skype)
Darlisa Ritter
Kathleen Yolish

Full Quorum

Board of Education Administration present:
Superintendent of Schools, Dr. Christopher Clouet
Assistant Superintendent of Schools, Lorraine Rossner
Finance Director, Dominic Barone
Human Resources Director, Carole Pannozzo

(1 tape on file in City/Town Clerk’s office)

The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

Approval of Agenda
Arlene Liscinsky moved to approve the agenda; seconded by Kate Kutash; motion passed unanimously.

Items Voted On
Dominic Barone provided a handout regarding the new cost schedule for the 3 School Fortification Project. He explained the initial cost schedule combined the three schools. At a recent meeting, we were requested by the State to provide an individual cost schedule for each school and to accept the new schedules.

Thomas Minotti moved to accept the revised cost schedule for the 3 School Fortification Project and reaffirm that we had accepted the project plans and project manual previously; seconded by Kate Kutash. Discussion included questions about the process and timing of the project. Superintendent Clouet was asked to apprise the board of any issues or delays with the project. Motion passed unanimously.

Dan DiVito stated there are 9 used desktops that a company is donating to us and an interactive touch screen 66” television, which is the new version of a Promethean board.
Arlene Liscinsky moved to accept two donation items (9 used ANSAC workstations and 1 new Promethean touch screen); motion seconded by Faith Hack and passed unanimously.

**Budget Workshop**
Superintendent Clouet stated we are ready to continue with conversations as part of the process of developing a budget for the next fiscal year. He recapped previous discussions including a review of the requests made on a zero-based budgeting concept from all administrators and a presentation at our last meeting of three scenarios regarding personnel. Based on the board’s requests from the last meeting, tonight’s presentation will be two less expensive scenarios for consideration. We continue to look at the core required personnel involved with delivery of certain required-by-law services and have made some adjustments in consultation with our Directors. The presentation will feature a live calculator aspect that will allow us to add or remove items from the menu and reflect the adjusted budget amount.

Dominic Barone said he reviewed the comments from the last meeting and was able to reduce some of the requests after receiving feedback from departments. Two scenarios are being presented tonight. He gave an overview of the mandated scenario ($2.1m or 3.12%) and the modified mandated scenario ($1.6m or 2.24%). Lengthy discussion ensued and various options were introduced. There was strong support for a secretary for Facilities. One option was to include two half-time clericals for two departments (.5 Facilities, .5 Curriculum) and consensus was to accept.

Win Oppel asked if we have looked at some of our costs for natural gas, Propane, Autogas and health insurance account. Dr. Clouet responded affirmatively and said part of the assumptions built in to this model includes a reduction in what we would allocate for utilities, based on experience and trends.

Mark Holden said he has strong reason to believe that the Mayor will not approve any budget that requires a tax increase. Mr. Holden has no expectations that a $1.687m or 2.24% request will be approved. He stated we need to show that we are trying to work with the Mayor to present the lowest responsible budget we can, and we are trying to be mindful of the taxpayers. Part of that is to establish that we are trying to be reasonable and looking to be frugal so that we can bring in the best education that we can at a specific price, because price matters to the people who cut the check.

Kathy Yolish made a strong argument for hiring at least one Assistant Principal and discussed the necessity for a School Counselor at the larger elementary schools and SIS, based on the increased needs of today’s children.

The board discussed the Assistant Principal position and a model to include two School Counselors ($90,000 each) and one Assistant Principal ($140,000), which would increase the request to 2.888% or just over $2m. Dr. Clouet said that while he understands the very reasonable arguments made about asking for what we think we need, his recommendation as Superintendent is that we need to come in as close as possible to be under 3%. Mark Holden said he will support whatever the board decides but encourages the board to come in as low as possible.
David Gioiello expressed his opinion that the public will not respond positively to adding administrative costs and that a better, stronger case can be made for a School Counselor.

There was discussion of daily occurrences at schools that require involvement of multiple staff members to handle.

Dr. Clouet commented that the needs are real, and we have very able administrators and teachers that do a fine job. The reality is to help those very children we’ve talked about and the other kids in their classes make it through in a way that helps them all achieve at the highest possible levels. Having two extra counselors would certainly not be a bad idea. A model showing two School Counselors and no Assistant Principal was discussed.

Chairman Holden asked for board members’ opinions and some were concerned that one Assistant Principal split with three schools would diminish capacity to do a good job. Beverly Belden and Kristen Santilli were asked to speak and both were in favor of sharing an Assistant Principal and discussed how they have worked together to share a School Counselor. Mrs. Santilli stated a Counselor cannot take on the administrator role. Lorraine Rossner, who had once been an Assistant Principal shared with two schools, confirmed that a three-school split is a set-up for failure; however, a two-school split is manageable. Arlene Liscinsky emphasized that we need to present what we need as best for the district and favored one Assistant Principal and one School Counselor. Kathy Yolish would like to see at least one Assistant Principal. Kate Kutash would like to at least start with one Assistant Principal and one School Counselor. David Gioiello referred to public perception and supported Counselors but not Assistant Principals. Darlisa Ritter suggested looking at the responsibilities of Principals, including cumbersome teacher evaluations and observations. She was not in favor of Assistant Principals but felt School Counselors add more value with specific training to handle crisis.

Dr. Clouet reiterated the board’s desire to explore what it would look like to add an Assistant Principal and look for some form of reduction to defray the cost. The board was unanimous with the concept of two School Counselors. Dr. Clouet said it would be a 2.758% increase or $1,900,016.
(Note: Tape 1; Side B – 7:42 p.m.)

There was further general discussion about Zero-Based Budgeting. Dave Gioiello said no justification has been presented for our current teaching staff or why we have current class sizes – only additions. What is size of classroom so we can safely evacuate students? Dr. Clouet responded that we have talked to our heads of Facilities and Safety, as well as with Fire officials. The answer to question is our current buildings are able to be evacuated safely. The amount of students we have in the buildings now are safely evacuated and we are within code.

Chairman Holden adjourned the meeting at 7:57 p.m.

Diane Luther

Diane Luther
Secretary to Board of Education
January 27, 2016